



Ex-national footballer Kaiser Hamid, wearing a suit, tries to convince Mohammedan players to return to the game after they had refused to play in protest of a disallowed goal during yesterday's charity football match against Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

PHOTO: STAR

Mohammedan go one up

Football back with a bang

SPORTS REPORTER

Red cards, a disallowed goal, refusal to play and tiebreaker make a competitive football match entertaining.

All these components fit within the spirit of the game though. But when a team decide to walk away from an exhibition match -- organised for the noble cause of raising fund for cyclone victims -- things turn nasty.

Mohammedan defeated Abahani 5-4 in sudden-death tiebreaker after the two archrivals' first meeting of the three-match Teletalk Series ended in a goalless draw at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday, but the winners wounded the spirit of the game when they refused to play over a disallowed goal.

Abahani fullback Mintu made a goalline clearance in the last minute of the regulation 90 minutes as Mohammedan players claimed goal.

A mid-pitch fistfight followed between the two most senior players in the ground -- Abahani captain Arif Khan Joy and Mohammedan's guest footballer Hassan Al Mamun -- and referee Tayeb Hassan sent off both to restart the game in the injury time.

After the final whistle, when all players should have stayed inside the pitch for the penalties, the Mohammedan booters suddenly walked off. Surprisingly, ex-national player and coach Shafiqul Islam Mamun was leading the way.

It took a lot of persuasion by former Mohammedan and national stars Kaiser Hamid and Rumman Wali Bin Sabbir to calm the black and whites and send them back.

The 10,000-strong crowd finally saw normalcy return but ex-players criticised Mohammedan's attitude towards a match where only distressed people could have some gain.

"This is stupidity. This type of attitude will not take our football anywhere," said a frustrated former national and Mohammedan captain Badal Roy in his immediate reaction.

"I went out because of the red card to our player, not giving us a penalty and disallowing a genuine goal," said a fuming Manik defending himself. "My team also suffered due to biased refereeing in the recent past and I cannot stand that any longer."

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu claimed they only took part in the shootout for the sake of football.

"No team can leave the pitch before the tiebreaker. Even if they need any refreshment, it is provided inside the pitch. Mohammedan refused to play and we should have been declared winners according to FIFA rules," Rupu opined.

The game, however, was heavily action-packed as none of the sides showed any off-season signs of lethargy under the lights.

B. League champions Abahani drew early blood but Arif cleared a darting low cross by Emily in the fifth minute.

Mohammedan enjoyed superior ball possession later as the sky-blues' depleted backline, missing Siraji, Waly and Pradeep, struggled throughout.

The dependable Nazrul and debutant Dominic, an African recruit whose country of origin was not even known to the Abahani officials, made numerous mistakes to keep custodian Biplab under constant threat.

Mohammedan's guest striker Charles Figo, however, should have sealed the match in regulation time but the Nigerian wasted two first-half chances when he failed to keep his shots on open target after Farhad typical missed a sitter in the seventh minute.

Emily and Moni kept Abahani alive and the latter tested Aminul with a freekick from long range before providing a superb chance for fellow Muktiyoddha player Matiu Muna, who failed to get a touch at the far post.

Another guest of the day Aminul, who returned to action

after missing an entire season due to injury, lost a high cross by Abahani rightback Obaidur after the half-hour mark but fortunately, the ball returned to his gloves after kissing the crossbar.

Aminul, however, made a brilliant save when he held Muna's header from handshaking distance on a Moni freekick nine minutes after restart.

The rest of the show was Figo's, who was once denied by Obaidur's inspired defending, shot one over the bar, saw another one-on-one effort saved by Biplab's legwork.

Moni almost put Abahani ahead against run of play when he ran clear with Nazrul's overhead pass but Ariful made a successful tackle five minutes from time.

A counter attack in the next minute and Figo set substitute Rony a free hit but Biplab made a spectacular diving save. In the final minute, Rony cut a perfect cross from left but Biplab stopped Figo's header from point-blank range. The ball rolled towards goal and Mintu shot it out from the line to spark controversy that ended in a fiasco.

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Reds rout Bolton

AFP, Liverpool



Rafael Benitez insisted that Liverpool are well-placed to end their

18-year wait for a league title after climbing to third in the Premiership with a comfortable 4-0 victory against Bolton.

Goals from Sami Hyypia, Fernando Torres and Ryan Babel, plus a Steven Gerrard penalty, proved too much for Bolton, who suffered their first league defeat under recently-appointed manager Gary Megson.

But with 21-million-pound signing Torres looking impressive as he netted his eleventh goal in 17 appearances for the club, Benitez claimed that Liverpool now have what it takes to overhaul Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United to win the title.

Benitez said: "We have to play a lot of games in December and January, so let's see. We must keep the squad focused and concentrated."

"But in the last three years, we

have been too far away from the leaders at this time of the season, yet we are now closer and we have a better squad, so I have confidence.

"Let us wait until we get to the end of January, though, before we see what the situation is then. We have confidence and we will keep going and hope that the other teams make mistakes."

"But I have a lot of confidence in the team for the second half of the season if we stay close to the others. We can improve and some of our players are already playing very well."

Torres, a club record buy from Atletico Madrid during the close season, is proving to be a crucial figure for Liverpool with his goal threat and Benitez admits that the Spain striker is carrying the goalscoring burden at Anfield.

He said: "When you have a striker who can score 20 goals a season, it can sometimes make it easy for the defenders not to score. But when you have a 20-goal striker, you need other players to score 15 goals and I think we have that."

"The team played well. It wasn't fantastic, but it was a good game and we created a lot of chances. We

scored four and it could have been more, so I must be pleased with the performance of the team."

Bolton remain in trouble at the wrong end of the table just eight days after beating champions Manchester United at the Reebok and Megson admits that his players simply failed to perform against Benitez's team.

Megson said: "It was down to earth after last week's win against United, but we just didn't play well or compete as well as we should have done or as well as we did against United."

"I told the players before this game that we had to make sure that we use that performance against United as the benchmark for the rest of the season. It set a standard in terms of the way we should go about games, but we didn't match that today."

"Nothing will change in terms of our short and long-term objectives, however, no matter what the result of games like this or the one against United. We know what we need to do and what we are good at. We know what we need to bring in and that won't change."

Cech can't wait

AFP, Prague

Goalkeeper Petr Cech believes the Czech Republic have an ideal opportunity to get their Euro 2008 campaign off to a strong start after being drawn on Sunday to play the opening match in Basel against hosts Switzerland.

"The Swiss team are fast improving, in addition they will be at home, but it's not bad to play the opening match against the Swiss because they may show signs of nerves," said Cech.

Both teams are drawn in Group A along with Portugal and Turkey.

"I think that all the rivals in our group are playable. It's an interesting group we can be satisfied with this draw," he said.

"The Turks are old hands at big tournaments and as for Portugal they are a very attractive opponent. In addition this match could have a special flavour for me because I may come up against my Chelsea teammates Ricardo Carvalho et Paulo Ferreira."

As for Group C which includes world champions Italy, France, Netherlands and Romania, Cech said: "You mustn't underestimate the Romanians. In my opinion they will have a big impact on the outcome in this group."

Czech striker Jan Koller believes they have a good opportunity to lay the groundwork to lift the title for the second time after winning as the former Czechoslovakia in 1976. They were runners-up in 1996.

"The Swiss will benefit from a lot of support but will be also under big pressure," he said.

"At Euro 2004 we waited four days to play our first match, this time we're playing the opening match. It's much better like that. It's very open in our group, anyone can qualify, but naturally Portugal are the favourites."

Cuper gets the sack

AFP, Seville

Relegation-threatened Spanish first division side Real Betis have sacked coach Hector Cuper, the club announced via its web site on Monday.

Cuper was dismissed after their latest loss, a 2-0 home defeat to Atletico Madrid on Sunday.

The Seville-based club, which played in the Champions League two years ago after finishing fourth in La Liga the season before, is second from bottom in with only two wins from 14 matches.

"Cuper has proven himself to be a gentleman throughout his time at the head of the team. It is the results that have been the reason for his departure," said Betis in a statement published on their official website.

The 52-year-old Argentine, who has also coached Valencia and Inter Milan among others, joined the club in the summer.

He is the third Spanish first division coach to part company with his club this season, following in the footsteps of Levante's Abel Resino and Valencia's Quique Sanchez Flores of Valencia.

Reserve team coach Francisco Chaparro will again take over as the first team coach, and this time could get the job on a permanent basis.

Chaparro saved Betis from relegation with a win on the final day of last season after former French international Luis Fernandez was sacked following a humiliating 5-0 home defeat in their penultimate game, which had left them in danger of going down.

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PHOTO: AFP

AC Milan playmaker Kaka displays his Ballon d'Or trophy at the Piazza del Duomo square in Milan on Sunday.

Kaka warns Celtic

AFP, Milan



New Ballon d'Or winner Kaka sent out a warning to Celtic ahead of the Scots' Champions League trip to the San Siro on Tuesday night.

The Brazilian playmaker was named Ballon d'Or winner on Sunday to cap a stunning season during which he inspired Milan to the Champions League crown with a 2-1 victory over Liverpool in May.

But despite a less than impressive start to the Italian domestic season - Milan lie eighth and 16 points off champions, leaders and bitter city rivals Inter Milan - Kaka is hungry for more - and that spells bad news for Celtic.

Kaka has already won everything at club and international level but he wants to do it all over again, and the first step on that journey is to ensure top spot in the Champions League group D.

A draw will be enough for Milan to ensure they finish first, and also enough for Celtic to progress to the knock-out phase for the second year in a row, but given the

Glaswegians last-gasp heroics against Shakhtar Donetsk last week, Milan won't want to take anything for a granted and will be aiming to win.

And Kaka certainly isn't in the mood to take his foot off the gas.

"I want to win everything again. I want to repeat everything I've already won: from the Champions League to the Ballon d'Or."

And Celtic need to watch out because Kaka just wants to get better.

"I hope to learn and to improve," he added, before moving to reassure his club's fans that he has no intention of leaving the San Siro.

"I have had many chances to move on for more money but I haven't done it. My future is here. I am happy to stay in Italy with Milan. I don't need to change teams. Our aim is to bring the Club World Cup back to Milan."

That could prove the biggest stumbling block to Milan's hopes of victory on Tuesday night - focus has already started to switch to Japan where the European champions begin their Club World Cup campaign on December 13.

With qualification for the second phase already assured, it would be easy to lose concentration, possibly playing into Celtic's hands.

However, the Scots' away form in Europe is abysmal and that could cost them a place in the second round.

If Shakhtar Donetsk beat Benfica at home on Tuesday, Celtic will have to get a point in Milan to avoid playing their trade in the UEFA Cup after the New Year.

Benfica have some motivation to earn a win in the Ukraine, though, as that would be enough for them to keep their European campaign alive by qualifying for the UEFA Cup.

But this is the fifth time that Celtic have reached the group stages of the Champions League and so far, in 14 away matches, they have lost 13 and drawn one - although that was against Barcelona three seasons ago.

Should Shakhtar win and Celtic lose, the Ukrainians will go through courtesy of their better head-to-head record, having won 2-0 at home and lost only 2-1 away.



PHOTO: AFP

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard (R) converts a spotkick for this team's third goal during their victory over Premiership rivals Bolton at Anfield on Sunday.

Modest Lanus crowned champions

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Modest Lanus won the Argentine championship for the first time in their 92-history on Sunday, wrapping up the title with a 1-1 draw at Boca Juniors.

Tigre, the only team with a chance of catching them, had two players sent off in a 1-0 defeat at Argentinos Juniors.

Lanus, from the sprawling southern suburbs of Buenos Aires, finished their campaign with 38 points from 19 games, four ahead of Tigre and another three clear of third-placed Boca.

Needing only a draw, Lanus went ahead eight minutes before halftime when striker Jose Sand out-jumped the Boca defence at a corner to head his 15th goal of the competition.

Boca took control in the second half and Uruguay forward Carlos Bueno missed two good chances after there-start.

The South American champions finally equalised in the 67th minute when striker Martin Palermo scored at the second attempt after his first effort was saved by Mauro Bossio.

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